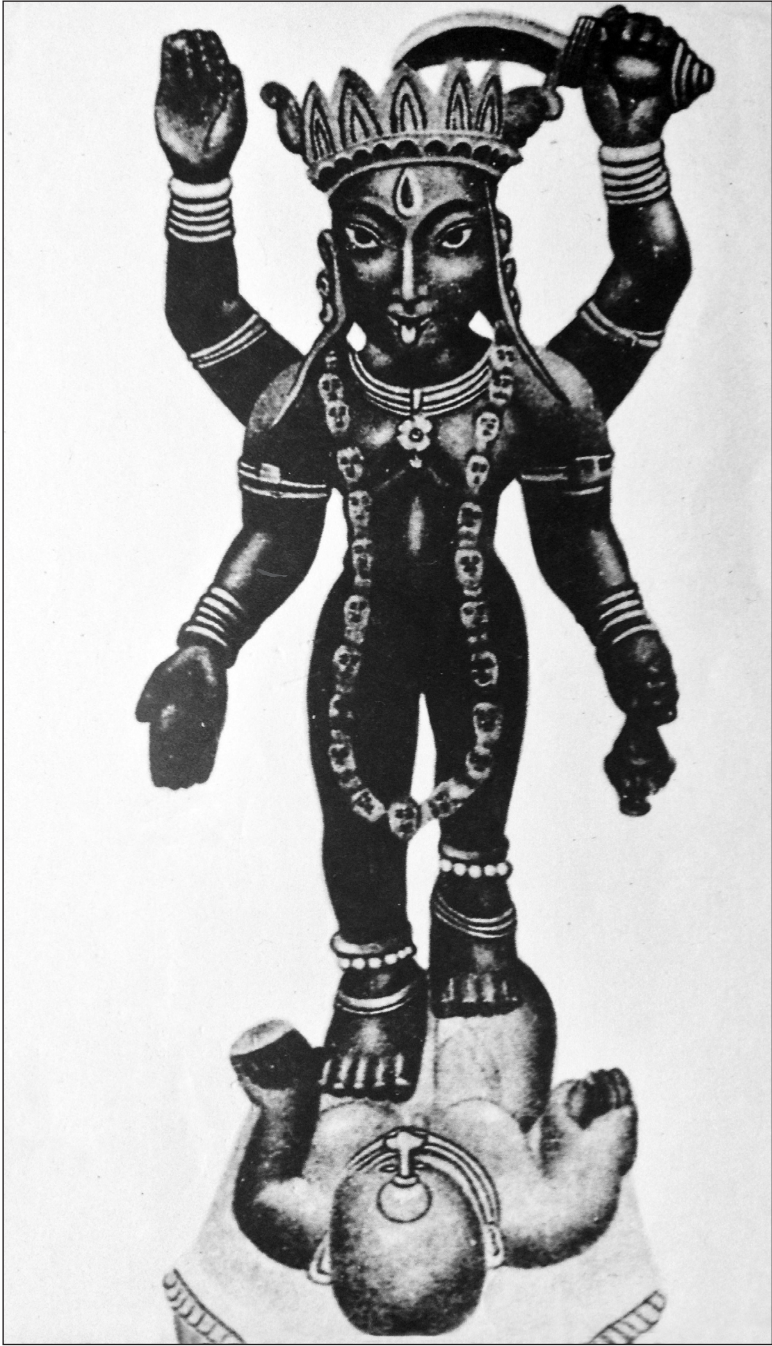
Approaching the Primordial Dark Goddess Through the Song of Her Hundred Names



Aditi Devi

In Praise of Ādyā Kālī



Oṁ namoḥ Ādyāye

In Praise of Ādyā Kālī

Approaching the Primordial Dark Goddess Through the Song of Her Hundred Names

Aditi Devi

HOHM PRESS
Chino Valley, Arizona

Cover Design: Zac Parker, Kadak Graphics, Paulden, AZ

Cover Image: Twenty-Armed Guhya Kālī. Vintage lithograph. Private collection. Used with permission.

Interior Design and Layout: Becky Fulker, Kubera Book Design, Prescott, AZ

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Aditi, Devi (Ma).

In praise of Adya Kali : approaching the primordial dark goddess through the song of her hundred names / By Aditi Devi (Ma).

pages cm

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-935387-54-1 (trade pbk. : alk. paper)

1. Kali (Hindu deity)--Prayers and devotions. 2. Tantras. Mahanirvanatantra. Adyakalikadevyah satanamastotram--Criticism, interpretation, etc. I. Tantras. Mahanirvanatantra. Adyakalikadevyah satanamastotram. II. Title.

BL1225.K32A35 2013

294.5'211--dc23

2013030357

Hohm Press
P.O. Box 4410
Chino Valley, AZ 86323
800-381-2700
http://www.hohmpress.com

This book was printed in the U.S.A. on recycled, acid-free paper using soy ink.



ॐ गं गणपतये नम

Om̐ gam Ganapataye namaḥ



In front – She
To the left and
To the right – She
To the sides – She
Behind – She
In the lotus of the heart,
None other than She

On one road
And then the other
Wherever I turn,
There She Is

My suffering is of believing
She is distant
But there is no nature
Apart from Her

She She She She She She
What *is* this non-dualist creed
When She is all that Is?
(Amaruśatika; translated by Ina Sahaja, 2011)[1]



Oṁ 64 Yoginīs,
Come here, come here!
(Rodrigues 2003:200)

Whether fierce or gentle, terrible to behold, all-powerful,
Residing in the sky, on earth, or in the vastness of space,
May these Yoginīs be well disposed towards me.

To those eternal Yoginīs by whose glory
The Three Worlds have been established,
To them I bow down, to them I pray.
(*Kulārṇava Tantra* 7.13 and 8.50, as cited in Dehejia 1986:34)



Contents



Foreword

by Dawn Cartwright

To look into the eyes of a Tantrika is to dance on the edge the cosmos.

Worlds and galaxies play along her lashes. Birth and death coexist—joyously—in the transparency of her gaze. Aditi Devi and I were presenting at a festival dedicated to the Divine Feminine in the spring of 2011, I turned a corner, our eyes met for the first time, I fell instantly in love.

As a teacher and seeker for many years along the Tantric path, I recognized this love immediately. I knew, simultaneously, I'd met a great adept, for only those who have died to all else can transmit the enormity of Kālī's love in a single glance. Aditi Devi is such a woman. The love recognized none other than Kālī.

In Praise of Ādyā Kālī: Approaching the Primordial Dark Goddess Through the Song of Her Hundred Names is this love affair. Rare and hidden traditions, enigmatic stories and detailed practices invite the reader to see, taste and touch Kālī themselves, in all her forms, sweet and terrible, as we are carried beyond words and descriptions into the living experience of the fierce mother goddess herself.

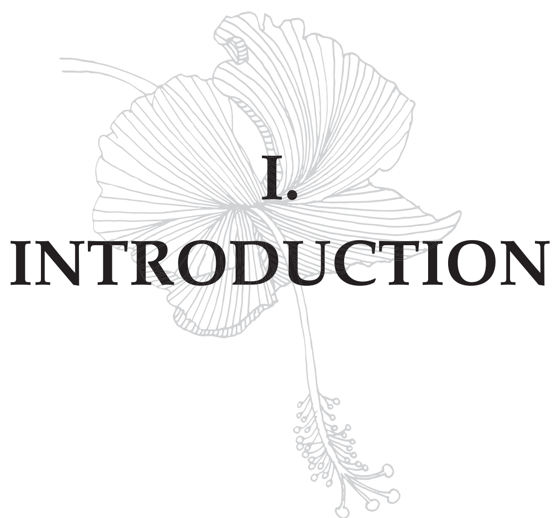
With tenderness and simplicity, the most intricate esoteric Tantrika practices are revealed, initiated, embodied. Aditi Devi initiates you, step by step into this ancient song in praise of

Kālī, revealing, in unexpected moments, the sublime within the mundane.

In my twenty-two years exploring the mysteries of Tantra and sexuality in my own practice, I've come to realize there comes a moment when skimming the surface no longer satisfies. *In Praise of Ādyā Kālī: Approaching the Primordial Dark Goddess Through the Song of Her Hundred Names* is a deep dive, it's Tantra in all its stark magnificence. The *Song of Her Hundred Names* has ignited all my practice and revealed to me a love that can be neither divided nor diminished.

Dawn Cartwright
Director Chandra Bindu Tantra Institute
August 10th, 2013
Santa Monica, California

www.dawncartwright.com



I.
INTRODUCTION



1
Her Names with Rose Petals

We are sitting knee to knee in the ritual space. There is a large shrine to several forms of Kālī in the center. Her name, her names, repeating Ādyā Kālī's names one after the other. Chanting them, singing them, relishing them, laughing with them, and crying with them, knowing that she is manifesting as the form of each and every one of her names. As each Sanskrit name moves through our bodies and mouths and is uttered into the space between us, we offer a rose petal to the one sitting across from us by touching it to our heart, throat, and then third eye before placing it at the feet of the form of Kālī as our friend. Here, in a circle of beloved yoginīs and yogis, we are reciting the *Song of the Hundred Names of Ādyā Kālī* during our weekly community Kālī *Pūjā*.* Everything changes as a result. Tensions have drained away and discomforts are forgotten. At some point, the room begins to glow as the recitation resonates and everyone begins to feel that their beloved Kālī is sitting knee to knee with them receiving their offering. We also begin to know that we are the form of Ādyā Kālī and a loved one is making offerings to us as we morph through all of her sacred forms. We were, and are, all that. Relationality is unfolding. The room is filled with rose petals, with her love, and with our devotion. Our love and awareness have moved out to meet her in each other.

* All terms marked with * are defined in the Glossary, pp. 200–210.

The version of our community recitation of the Tantric liturgy of the *Song of the Hundred Names of Ādyā Kālī* that you hold in your hands was first practiced inside this sacred *cakra** of female practitioners, yoginīs, who had requested that we undertake a community practice commitment based on my devotional re-translation and editing of the original Tantric liturgy of the *ādyā kālikādevyāḥ śatanāma stotram*. Together, we committed to the spiritual practice (*sādhana**) of the recitation of this ancient and sacred liturgy to the Śakta Tantric goddess Kālī over 108 nights during a recent cold and dark winter. We undertook a *saṅkalpa** together, a formal spiritual commitment to this precious Kālī sādhana.

This liturgy consists of the hundred names of Ādyā Kālī that begin with the first consonant of the Sanskrit alphabet, *ka*.[2] The names themselves are a sublime garland of flowers that we offer at her feet by reciting them out loud, one by one, in front of a shrine dedicated to Ādyā Kālī. This book, *In Praise of Ādyā Kālī*, is the form of and source of support for you in your relationship with Kālī and for the study, practice, and contemplation of the *Song of the Hundred Names of Ādyā Kālī*. Your devotion, curiosity, and willingness are all you need to begin. Here you will find instructions for building a shrine to Ādyā Kālī, developing a nightly spiritual practice that includes the contemplations focusing on each name; these can be used as a meditation in conjunction with undertaking a nightly recitation of the *Song of the Hundred Names of Ādyā Kālī*. Perhaps you might consider reciting this liturgy for 108 nights.

The commitment to recite her names is a potent form of spiritual practice, as our practice community discovered early in: we had undertaken a powerful form of spiritual practice both as individual devotees and as a community. Even though we were separated geographically, spread across the globe, we begin to have the experience of moving together in this, as one.

This community experience resonates with an important Tantric vow in the spiritual lineage of *Kālīkula*:* no one left behind. Practicing together is an inclusion of all forms of relationship. It is an inclusion of everyone and everything on the path. As you begin to consider doing this practice, please know that you are not alone. While you may not personally know others who are reciting the *Song*, I assure you that there are yoginīs and yogis all over the world who are doing this same practice right now. I also recite her *Song* daily. It is rich and powerful to do this together in community. It's also substantial to undertake this practice as an individual devotee, letting your own love affair with Kālī develop in the intimacy of this recitation of her hundred names.

In Sanskrit, the name of this Kālī liturgy is the *ādyā kālikādevyāḥ śatanāma stotram* and it comes from the *Mahānirvāṇatantraṃ* (more commonly referred to as the *Mahanirvana Tantra*). This liturgy is found in Chapter Seven of the *Mahanirvana Tantra* and is sometimes also called the *ādyākālī svarūpa stotram*. In English, this translates to the *Song of the Hundred Names of Ādyā Kālī* or the *Song of Ādyā Kālī's Own Form* pointing to a major theme: this song of Ādyā Kālī's names is her very form. In some of the English-language literature, this liturgy is also sometimes referred to as the *Tantrik Hymn to Kālī* or *The Hundred Names of Goddess Kālī*.[3]

This book is an offering of support for you in considering undertaking a more formal devotional relationship to Kālī as well as to support the development of your ability to move love and awareness (aka bliss and freedom) through an open body. This is the path of unfolding towards embodied awakening that is Kālī's lifeblood. While the original impetus for this devotional translation of Kālī's name liturgy and for the 108 night sādhana commitment was to fulfill this request of my female students, yoginīs, the recitation of this liturgy can be undertaken by anyone who has a hunger to dive profoundly into their relationship with Kālī. What this means is that the material in this book will

have the flavor of the original teachings offered to a community of women; this is reflective of the philosophical and spiritual worldview of the northern Kālīkula (the details and nuances of what this means will unfold as we proceed). Everyone is welcome here even with this gynocentric focus.

In Praise of Ādyā Kālī is designed for a wide-ranging audience. As spiritual pilgrims, we are more highly educated and more widely traveled than ever. Our hunger for knowledge (and the availability of so much on the Internet) has enhanced our abilities to take in information that just a decade ago might have been reserved for conversations among elite scholars or whispered between esoteric practitioners in remote caves, forests, and godowns. Today, everywhere, people are hungry to touch the depths of beingness. I offer all of this fully, even if doing so may take us into the realm of the esoteric footnote to provide more depth of understanding for those who want and enjoy such things. Foreign language terms have been kept for the sheer beauty and precision of the words (and are often not able to be easily rendered into English). Long intricate definitions and complex philosophical discussions are included. There is an extensive glossary in the back to support you with the words in South Asian languages, including the diacritical marks, which may prove useful as your studies and experiences grow.[4] The bibliography is a bit much, I admit, yet perhaps you will add a few of the items listed to your own treasure box of wisdom. As astute readers with devotional yearnings, I trust you to take in what you want, and what serves you, and to leave the rest for another moment. Some of the most important books I ever read have challenged me to grow because they either acted as conveyors of a transmission, or they pushed up against the edges of my own intellectual or emotional boundaries inspiring me to keep going.

This book is dense in places and playful in others. My hope is that the threads of scholarly information, practice wisdom, and

personal experience that are intermingled here will support you on your journey of increasing depth, devotion, and connection. May this liturgy in praise of Ādyā Kālī be an offering to you as you establish your own relationship to her. May all beings benefit! *Oṁ namoḥ Ādyāye!*



2
Kālī and Ādyā Kālī

What does this all mean and who is Kālī, more precisely? I have been sitting with the question of what can I share with you about my beloved, the love of my life. What can I say about her that will support you to know her? How do we slip into this river together, in a way that will help you approach the blue-black goddess Kālī at the center of the yoniverse? There is no way that I can fathom a simple introduction as I write this. I am thinking of all the practitioners that I know, and of how Kālī came to each of them in a flash, wild, uncontainable, fierce, penetrating, and unremitting. She has been known to come on as lightning: bold, loud, and crackling on a clear day, taking us to our knees. We then have to learn to make room for her in our lives, in our bodies, and then eventually learn to fall in love. There is not a straightforward way that this happens, nor a clear path.

To begin to offer a picture and hopefully thus a feel for a few of the threads that allow us to experience Kālī directly, here is a poem to the Kālī of the cremation grounds by Rāmlāl Dāsdatta of Bengal, in the style of the love poems to Kālī from her heartland.

> Because You love cremation grounds
> I have made my heart one
> so that You

Black Goddess of the Burning Grounds
can always dance there.
No desires are left, Mā, on the pyre
for the fire burns in my heart,
and I have covered everything with its ash
to prepare for Your coming.
As for the Conqueror of Death, the Destructive Lord [Śiva],
He can lie at Your feet. But You, come, Mā,
dance to the beat; I'll watch You
with my eyes closed.
(McDermott 2001b:74-75) [5]

There are so many elements primary to Kālī in this poem: her presence with death—and her presence as death—in the cremation grounds; her unending dance which brings both life and death; the way she burns up all that separates us from her; the way she takes up residence in our bodies as a burning force, a fiery urgency that cannot be cooled; her love of ash and bones as a reminder of how short life is, how transitory our existence. Through her, we can come to know what is larger than our own life and death. We let so much die (or we burn it down in the middle of the night) so we might have room for her in our lives, for her union with Śiva (another life-death dancer). Śiva beats the drum, and is the dancehall. Kālī dances. We watch it all from the inside out with our eyes closed; we are making love to her and him, in our bodies, in the endless fires. Kālī is a mystery and also very plain. She is the transcendent cosmic birthing and the daily midwiving of life.

The renowned Bengali devotional poet Ramprasad Sen has described this aspect of her thus:

You are the mother of all
And our nurse. You carry the Three Worlds

In Your belly.
(Nathan and Seely 1999:16).

This womb-aspect of Kālī is ever present side by side with her cremation ground forms. She is also desire. Her flavors are endless.

Kālī is truly the love of my life. She is my beloved. My life is oriented to the rhythms she dictates, to the service she requests (and requires). Her holy days, her moons, her festivals. She entered my body more than twenty-four years ago and it took me a long time to come to terms with this; it was some time after that reckoning that I began the slow movement towards falling in love with her. For some time now, I have been totally and irrevocably in love with her. I know that my life, body, and being are not separate from union with her. It's not always pretty, nor is it easy. But it is rich and more fulfilling than anything else I've done.

Dedicating myself fully to serving her is the most interesting experiment I can run with my life. Even so, I don't expect anyone else to follow in my footsteps; please, know that your relationship with Kālī is on your terms. I'm at one wild end of the spectrum in terms of what is possible.

I encourage you to find your own way with this, with her. Especially since Kālī is a bit scary for some people. After seeing images of her, hearing stories, or strolling around the Internet, it seems that most of what we can find focuses on her frightening death-giving aspects, or is just plain confusing and without the necessary background material to make sense of this fierce dark esoteric Tantric goddess. One of the things that I love about Kālī is that she is also the life-giving and nurturing mother. Kālī is also a healer and protectress. She guards the doorway between the manifest and the unmanifest. She brings the unmanifest into form, and in this form, she is Ādyā Kālī, the primordial Kālī. Kālī is also a lover; and not surprisingly, she is the beloved. She is the

heat of kuṇḍalinī. She is the fire pit, the fire, and the fire-tender. Kālī has so much strength and capacity that she can heal all our wounds and take away all our fears.

Not only is Kālī the darkness, but she eradicates darkness as well. She gives the disease and removes it. This is one of the great paradoxes of the fierce Tantric goddesses: they are the quality that they also heal. We walk towards her, and this, in order to be free of it. Kālī shows us the way to freedom. She is fierce, in many of her forms, and yet she also offers peace, truth, goodness, and beauty. All of these qualities are hers as well, and thus also available to us as her devotees. Can you feel how her darkness and fierceness might also be peace, truth, goodness, and beauty? What is this paradox that Kālī inhabits as her primordial nature?

Part of the beauty of the liturgy of Kālī's hundred names is that many of the names apparently contradict each other. Coming into relationship with this contradictory nature of Kālī (and thus all reality) allows us to practice into understanding how *all* aspects of existence are her. From here, we can begin to feel how our personal existence, *just as it is*, is her grace, her living embodiment. This is the mystery lived in full embodiment.

Underneath all of this is the understanding that our bodies, energies, bodily fluids, when combined with spiritual practices and devotion to Kālī, can lead us to awakening in this body, in this lifetime. Our bodies offer us all we need to move into union if we are willing to enter into this landscape wholeheartedly, with devotion, and continually asking if we can see goddess now. How about now? Is this Kālī? That? Yes, it's all Kālī. All of it. Working this conceptual edge along with the body refinements of spiritual practice can suffuse our awareness with these realizations, transform our molecular structure, and guide us into the fluidity that allows union in all forms.

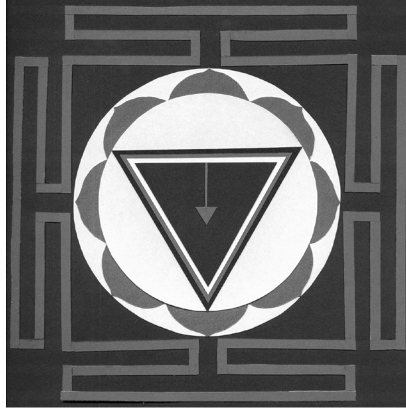
Our daily Kālī practice is the centerpoint-*bindu** that takes us into our inner depths, establishes our relationship to her, and

from that rich pulsation we emerge into relationality with others. This recitation of Kālī's hundred names is focused on moving outward from this bindu-center, from the depth of our personal practice, into relationality with others.

The *Song* that is the substance of this book focuses on the form of Kālī that we call *Ādyā Kālī*. This is the fiery graveyard Kālī and the cool loving Mother, both. Who, or what, then is Ādyā Kālī in this context? The term *Ādyā* means *primordial*, *primal*, *first*, *original*, or *archean*.[6] Ādyā Kālī is the primordial energy, *śakti*, that creates, preserves, and transforms/dissolves all existence. At times, in some sources, Ādyā Kālī is understood to be identical with Dakṣiṇkālī, the four-armed form of Kālī who first entered my body back in the day many years ago on the edge of the Kathmandu valley at one of her open air shrines.

As the primordial śakti, Ādya Kālī is sometimes also called *Ādyā Śakti*. In this form, she is the primordial energy of the cosmos and the female energies of creation. She is ultimate reality and non-dual union, to use another vocabulary. She is pure consciousness and bliss, intermingled, before manifestation. Of course, in this primordial state before manifestation, there is no gender. Gender requires form. Before form manifests, it is pure potential. We refer to this energy of potentiation as feminine, she, because it has the power to produce, it has the power to give birth to form. Thus Ādyā Kālī is the womb of all creation. In this worldview, from the point of view of those who worship Kālī, she is also known as *Brahman** and this is made even clearer by some of the references to her as Kālī-Brahman. Another of Kālī's epithets is Brahmamayī, meaning "She Whose Essence is Brahman" (McDermott 2001b:173). Ādyā Kālī is Brahman, ultimate reality, inseparably.

Since Ādyā Kālī herself has no physical form, at least in the primordial state of Brahman, there are very few statues or representations of her. One of the two rare depictions of her



One version of a Yoni Yantra

is as a doorway or portal. This is the doorway between the manifest and the unmanifest. Another manifestation is as the squatting goddess who is sometimes called Lajjāgaurī; this form emphasizes her birthing of the cosmos from her body, her form.[7] She is both the static and the vibration as well as the formless as it gives form. She is the cosmic primordial womb, the *yoni**-matrix of existence, the yoniverse itself. Artistically, Ādyā Kālī is thus also sometimes represented as a *yoni-yantra** or just the yoni (womb and external genitalia). She is the threshold between formless and form, and between the unmanifest and the manifest. In addition, it could be said that Ādyā Kālī gives birth to the other forms of Kālī that we might know as Mahākālī or Dakṣiṇkālī.

How does the formless give birth to the form of all existence? This formless Ādyā Śakti becomes the universe first through a glimmer of light:

> She is light itself
>   and transcendent
> Emanating from Her body are rays
>   in thousands, millions, hundred millions.

There is no counting their great numbers.
It is by and through Her that all things
moving and motionless shine.
It is by the Light of this Devi that
all things become manifest.[8]

This *body* that is described in the third line is her light body, her womb body, her original primordial form. She is this light manifesting all of this existence as we know it. Her light permeates this world we know (as does her darkness, which we will discuss a little later on).

After her light, the next movement towards form is the formation of the *tattva*.* As one author describes it, "The term [tattva] is derived from the root *tat* meaning 'that' which is an epithet of *brahman*, the ultimate reality" (Bhattacharyya 2002:163). Here we feel more of the tendrils of connection that are held within Ādyā Kālī: ultimate reality (Brahman), the womb, and the manifestation of the tattvas from light. The tattvas unfold light into form. The thirty-six tattvas thus manifest from the womb mother of all existence.

One way that the term tattva can be translated is as *fundamental*; and in this system there are at least thirty-six fundamental building blocks of manifest existence. Kālī is here in the tattvas, linking them all together in her body. A tattva is an *element* or aspect of manifest existence that comes forth from the formless deity into concrete manifestation. Examples of tattvas in manifestation include earth, water, fire, air, ether, what we know as the senses (the mediums for olfactory sensations, taste sensations, visual sensations, etc.), excretion, sexuality, movement, apprehension/understanding, speech; locomotion is her tattva too. There is a great list of the tattvas on Wikipedia should you feel like getting even more esoteric. Ādyā Kālī brings forth the thirty-six tattvas so that existence and our embodied

experience of existence can take form. One of the forms this takes is actually you. Imagine her birthing all aspects of you.

Another way to understand this is that the tattvas manifest as each of her names as elucidated in the *Song of the Hundred Names of Ādyā Kālī*. Each of these forms has a distinct, unique flavor and the entire list of her names encompasses all of existence. While all these forms are indeed part of Ādyā Kālī's being, they are not her entirety. How could they be? How can this primordial ultimate non-dual reality have a singular all-inclusive form? One way to approach this question is to begin to take in the depth and complexity of Ādyā Kālī's forms through the recitation of her hundred names that begin with *ka*. In this way, we can begin to have the direct experience of her, the felt experience of her, in our bodies and around us. This, by the way, is the essence of why we undertake pilgrimage: to feel her body in the landscape, temples, and people and let it permeate us.

On endless pilgrimage to all the forms of her body that I can find, I was directed towards her formless form by a devotee while on a trip to Kolkata. He insisted on showing me one of Mā's sacred outdoor Tantric shrines as well as pointing me towards the hidden jewel of a temple called Ādyā Pīṭh that is her formless self (http://www.adyapeath.org). It is hidden around the back ways near the Dakṣiṇeśwar Temple for Mā Kālī on the Hooghly River.[9] Here, next to an orphanage, in the back alleys, is the seat/place/abode of Ādyā, the formless Primordial She. The temple is richly intertwined with the lives and spiritual devotion of the famous saint Śrī Rāmakṛṣṇa, his wife Śrī Śāradā Devī, and one of Rāmakṛṣṇa's disciples Annada Thakur.[10] This large and airy temple complex is a shrine to ultimate reality as Kālī and it is also a remembrance of her form as ultimate reality.

As the temple is open for *darśan** for only a few minutes each day, we sat at the viewing platform which is perched across the way from the main Ādyā Pīṭh temple. This was the closest

that we could get to the temple and it is the closest that most devotees and visitors can get. Primarily only the priests go up on the temple platform, and only the priests are allowed inside the main temple. Sitting on the cool cement, pressed in tightly in the women's section, I gazed at the enormity of a temple that felt in this moment somehow distant. I had grown accustomed to the intimacy of the Kāmākhyā Temple in Assam, one of my spiritual homes, where we come into direct full-bodied contact with the goddess Kāmākhyā Mā. As I sat at Ādyā Pīṭh I questioned: Why would they build a temple in such a way as to keep us so far separated from her?

When the immense doors of the temple finally opened, there was an audible gasp and murmurs of "*Mā*" moved through the crowd. I was struck by the enormity of the shrine and of her in this moment. The impact of her presence on my physical and subtle bodies gave me insight as to why she was so far away; I might have been disintegrated by her presence had I been much closer!

I also understood viscerally how Ādyā Kālī is so vast and so immense that she cannot be contained by structures. With the three-story-tall doors flung wide open, she was bursting out and flowing towards us and through us. She was all existence moving. All that I was feeling and seeing in that moment was her presencing for our benefit. Like a tsunami, Ādyā Kālī rolled through us on the platform across the way. I was swamped by her full presence; how could I ever have thought I was separate? I drank her in with every breath and as nourishment to my entire body on all the levels.

Across the way, inside the temple, the *mūrti** has three levels. At the base is a large image of Śrī Rāmakṛṣṇa. As the founder of the famous Dakṣiṇeśwar Temple to Kālī, he is quite famous and revered as a great Indian saint. In this neighborhood, he is the guru of all and everything, the guru of ultimate reality. Above

him is an equally large image of what they call Ādyā Mā. She is standing and striding forward towards us, her devotees. This is the same form as the goddess Dakṣiṇkālī and is of course related to the main form of Kālī at the Dakṣiṇeśwar Kālī Temple.

Above them, at the top level, is a mūrti of Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa; they are so close to each other that it took my breath away. The lovers intertwined atop Ādyā Kālī's head. Is this what she dreams of at night? Is this her daily visualization upon arising? Is this how she understands all reality? [11] Inside of Kālī's primordial womb we find the guru, this primordial Kālī (as Dakṣiṇkālī), and the union of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. Again, the union just springs up all around, in all forms, winding up into itself, in every way.[12]

That Kālī has this transcendent nature, is this transcendent nature, can be found in the oldest written documents, the oldest Tantras, that mention Kālī worship. She is *That* from the beginning of our documented sources and is the primordial womb. This Tantric text, the *Yonigahvara* (*Recess of the Womb*), dating from about 1200 C.E. relates that she is: ". . . beyond the senses, inconceivable, of free volition, free from defects, identical with the stainless supreme sky . . . [residing in] the sphere beyond the sky . . . " (Goudriaan (1981:76). Ādyā Kālī, thus, is nondual love-awareness, the sphere, or bindu, moving as consciousness in the primordial womb and taking form so that we might be in relationship with her. She is truly the mother of the universe and thus also the mother of enlightenment. The mother of everything, really.

Ādyā Kālī has a special place in north and northeastern India, where her devotees are numberless and her forms are endless. This Kālī is the primordial matrix of ultimate reality. She is the field of all. She is Śakti. She moves all that is unmanifest into manifestation. She is primordial reality. She is all that is, was, and will ever be. She is the amorphous Kālī who then takes shape through our recitation of her mantras and her names. She is the

primordial womb mother, the birthing goddess, and the hag-crone. All faces, all bodies, all forms are hers. Nothing left out.

A website dedicated to the Ādyā Pīṭh (Ādyā Peath) Temple includes photos as well as audio downloads of the *Ādyā Stotram* and her mantras (http://www.adyapeath.org/Docs.html). The *Ādyā Stotram* includes praise to Kāmarūpa, Kāmākhyā, the womb-yoni goddess of Assam. The pieces of my love affair with Kālī coalesce here in her primordial womb: Dakṣiṇkālī, Ādyā Pīṭh, Dakṣiṇeśvar, Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa, Kāmākhyā, and Gurvī*-Guru:* not separate, not separate.

3

The Turning Towards: Her Darkness and Her Fierceness

As we explore her mysteries as the play of light manifesting through the primordial womb, you may begin to understand as well that Kālī is associated with the deep and fecund dark. In alignment with this, she is often blue-black in color, and this distinctive coloring is often mentioned in descriptions of her. She is called *Dark Devī* (Nathan and Seely 1999:9, 19).

This darkness of hers is not something to be pushed away or held at arm's length. Kālī's primordial darkness is part of what takes form through the recitation of the *Song of Her Hundred Names*. For example, one description of her from the *Song* is as Kālarātriḥ, She Who Is the Night of Darkness. Another name is Kādambinī, She Who Is as Dark as a Bank of Rain Clouds.[13] As such, Kālī asks us to come to terms with her darkness, and thus all forms of darkness, in ourselves and the world. There is fecundity and hope and love in this darkness as we see in these descriptions of her that remove our fears: "Your name can blot out the fear of Death," (Nathan and Seely 1999:16) or

> Remembering that Her feet
> Cancel all fear,
> Who needs to fear Death?
> (Nathan and Seely (1999:53)

The final line of the *Song of the Hundred Names of Ādyā Kālī* points to this as well: "I make obeisance to She Who Is . . . the Destroyer of the Fear of Death." Her darkness has the power to remove all of our fears; her darkness is the remedy. Her darkness is also the spiritual path. As Andrew Schelling articulates so well in his description of fierce imagery found in the devotional poetry to Kālī: "This image, ghastly to those unschooled in its hidden meanings, holds precise philosophical and tantric instruction" (Schelling 2011:233). Holding this understanding close will support you as you practice the *Song of the Hundred Names of Ādyā Kālī*. The remembrance that there is wisdom and spiritual instruction to be found in all the forms of the dark is a profound teaching.

We tend to live in a world that valorizes the light over the dark in so many ways. One of the common (mis)understandings found in the spiritual teachings available to us in the West these days is that spiritual development means ascending, moving towards the light, and being light: We move upwards and out as a form of spiritual development. Let us explore another view here, the view that is central to the Kālī Practices and the Kālīkula.

That first autumn, when the original community of yoginīs committed to the *Song of the Hundred Names of Ādyā Kālī*, many of us were in parts of the world where the daily amount of sunlight was decreasing. Many of us, consciously and unconsciously began to focus on ways to increase the light in our lives as the natural darkness moved towards us and through us. I offered the yoginīs these same instructions around transforming their relationship to the dark (both the external darkening of the season as well as Kālī's darkness). Part of my own spiritual training has been to constantly *move towards* that which we perceive and experience as dark and constricted: moving into the dark whenever possible is to meet the darkness (and everything) with love, openness, and availability. We don't try to counteract the dark by increasing the

light, instead, we sit with what is actually happening whether it is the increasing dark or the increasing light.

My training and experience teaches that aligning with the dark as a source of wisdom is a vital part of the path of the yoginī and yogi; it is essential to who we are in these bodies. Making friends with the dark, our dark, her dark, is part of the path of embodiment. If you don't have experience with welcoming the dark, or if you have been enculturated or trained to avoid the dark, I'm inviting you to transform that here with your recitations of the *Hundred Names of Ādyā Kālī*. It is a real opportunity we have to befriend ourselves and her. This practice, and other practices in the Kālīkula, focus on bringing the energies down into our bodies, into form, in the pelvis. We come into embodiment and relationship with all sensation as the divine, as spirit.

Let me explain simply: she is the dark. All of her qualities and forms that are listed in the *Song of the Hundred Names of Ādyā Kālī* are her dark form coming into manifestation. The gift of the dark is union with her, in all her forms, in all forms, in all manifest and unmanifest existence. All of this exists within ourselves as well. Instead of turning away from the dark, the shadow, the scary, and the wounded, we turn towards it knowing it is a fertile source of wisdom and teaching.

Our nightly practice, of the *Song of the Hundred Names of Ādyā Kālī,* with a focus on one of her names, supports us in generating a kind of relaxed ease and awareness in our bodies/minds/spirits and with the dark as Kālī. We rest in her flow. In addition to linking our bodies and beings to Kālī, it also supports us in generating love and awareness. This allows me to be aware of myself, as Aditi Devi, and aware of something happening that is called Aditi Devi. There is spaciousness and a simultaneous dual awareness. I am both feeling something (feeling my body, my emotions, my relationships, my environment) and I'm also able to gain a little perspective and see myself in it. One teacher

describes this as being in the room and watching the room simultaneously. Both perspectives are valuable.

Once we have developed this dual sense of awareness of ourselves, we are ready to move towards a richer world of practice. When we know that we can return again and again to a knowing of our own inner world (subtle body and all that is there) as well as an awareness of ourselves in space and time, when we have allowed a sense of curiosity to develop around the experiences of others instead of an instant reactivity, it is time to go further into our practice. You may not yet be ready to do this, and that's just fine. I bring it to our conversations here, though, so we know what we are moving towards and cultivating. This deepening involves the practice of turning towards constriction and closure with openness. Let me repeat that in a slightly different way. When we feel constriction, in ourselves or in others, we practice to turn towards it with love and openness: *turn towards with openness and availability*. This means moving outside of ourselves at the moment when we want to constrict and turn inwards and separate out. All of us know what the quality of closure feels like; it is what creates disconnect and separation. It is actually pain and suffering. We may close in order not to feel the suffering of others, or to distance ourselves from our own pain. Or perhaps it is just an old automatic response to our own pain, and to the pain and suffering of others. We may never have trained in openness nor been in a context that valued it. Yet, we can feel the beauty of openness in others and we can feel the magnetic pull of it. We are actually drawn towards openness in others, even if we can't source it on our own. Right now, can you think of someone you know who exudes an openness that you enjoy, that you can relax into?

Whatever the underlying reasons for our habits of closure, our practice with Kālī allows us some of the love, space, and

freedom to begin to relate to ourselves and the world differently. In many Tantric lineages, we even take a vow about this: it is one of the first and most fundamental vows we can take on the path. We vow to practice turning towards constriction with openness. The vow doesn't mean we get it right, but it serves as an orienting compass as we move through our lives. This is a vow that we break constantly, actually, and yet return to as much as possible.

I'm not asking, nor even suggesting, that you take this on as a vow. I'm mentioning the vow only to give you a sense of what a serious piece of business this is, how seriously Tantric practitioners take this practice of turning towards closure with openness.

Would you like to run a small experiment with this in your life? If so, perhaps you would like to consider the following questions for yourself: Can you identify someone you have in-person contact with who exudes a quality of openness? If so, see if you can identify what it is about their openness that attracts you, and note if you simultaneously have any negative associations or feelings about their openness? Do you judge it either negatively or positively? Do you shut down in this person's presence? Do you tell yourself any stories about this openness? Can you feel their openness as a quality in your own body? What does it feel like? Can you magnify this? Do you want more of it or less? Why?

As a second step in this experiment, which can be done at the same time as you address the questions above, in your daily devotion of reciting Kālī's names, bring your awareness to your own experience in such a way that you become aware of ease, freedom, and love inside yourself. You are feeling these qualities, you are these qualities, and you are aware of them in yourself, moving through you, as you. Can you, perhaps, with the help of Kālī's names, expand those qualities outwards at all? To the edges of your own skin? Out beyond your skin? Can you

engage with others with these qualities moving through you? Perhaps you can identify some place in your life that has some closure in it and practice turning towards it with openness, for just this week? It doesn't have to be anything big; just something near that you could work with easily. What might that be like? How might this practice change something in your life? As we do this, we have the opportunity to drop in more fully with Kālī Mā, below the surface. Another layer of bliss-consciousness is waiting for us there—in fact, it is already being revealed.

With the recitation of the liturgy of the *Song of the Hundred Names of Ādyā Kālī*, we are journeying towards the center of Kālī's womb together, spiraling in and downwards into the sanctity of her dark places. This spiraling inwards is like Inanna's gates leading to the underworld where Inanna stands in front of her own dark self, her sister, and comes to terms with these aspects of herself.[14] It's not up and towards the light and somehow evolutionary. This spiraling movement is down and inward. It's not the *underworld* as this term is normally understood, however; it's the center of the yoniverse, moving towards the bindu. Our 108 nights of recitation of Kālī's hundred names is not about increasing light; it's about finding our way in the dark, towards the center, dropping into what is actually happening, not avoiding the dark or the shadow.

There is truly nothing to fear here. We are together in Kālī's lap. Moving into ourselves and her. In my own experience, moving into the dark willingly is accepting her darkness as the love that pervades the universe. It's her skin, her hair, her womb, her ways.

In order to make this passage, we will have to leave some stuff behind: old habits, beliefs, and ways of being. We enter here with our willingness to be transformed by the wisdom of the dark mother Kālī Mā. And in this, there is no up or down, nor right nor wrong. This turning towards everything with openness and allowing ourselves to transform our understandings of the dark

is what allows us to fall in love—to fall in love with ourselves, our loves, and with Kālī.

She offered me an instruction on the first night of our original community recitation of the *Song of the Hundred Names of Ādyā Kālī*. The words she gave me, which I share with you here, are meant to be repeated to oneself as a reminder of what we are moving towards: "I am far more interested in you falling in love, becoming the lover, than being a decent, good, or ____ student [fill in the blank with your own habit]." Per this, and knowing how many of us are actual students enrolled in or completing programs right now, as well as how many of us are still carrying the "good student" mantle, I want to invite you to drop any notions of having to get it right, be a good student, or perfect anything. Dropping these unnecessary shells is part of the journey towards what Kālī is actually gesturing towards with her entire being. Fall in love instead, be the lover.

What would it be like to allow yourself to fall in love with Kālī, a wholehearted, messy, alive, heart-breaking, womb-opening, love affair with the divine feminine? This is such a messy and radical proposition, and it takes great courage. I know that doing this isn't easy. These 108 nights are a time of being re-made, not a time to hold it all together. "Messy" is beautiful and welcome here. It's a good thing we have each other in this, you know? We have the combined wisdom of other women and men, taking their places together, in this rich place. This convening together is itself a Yoginī Temple, old school style, for sure. In this remote open-air temple, as the nights deepen like velvet on our bare skin, what would it take for you to fall in love? Fall in love with each other and yourself and her. What would serve your body to make it a vessel available for falling in love? More baths? More anointing with rose oils? More time with the recitation of the liturgy and your shrine? This is a time for her dark love to come though, not the bright Spring love. This is the love of moon

blood,[15] and the love of the dark moon. Let this be the love of making love with no lights. Can you feel what you can't see? Whatever it is, that has you more available for love and available for her darkness, please begin to do it now. Make it a part of your life during these 108 nights. We are in for a long journey and the material in this book is here to support you in this.

In this unfolding process, your shadow will surely arise to join us on this journey. Unhealed emotional and psychological wounds may be triggered. I implore you, please let this process unfold. Can you see this process as wisdom revealing itself? You will heal by bringing the wounding forth fully with kindness, love and non-judgment. Ask for support if you need it. Talk to your therapist or best friend or another yoginī or the moon or your cat. Take it all to Kālī. She is made for this. She eats it all and transforms it for us. Take it to your shrine and your practice. Her fierceness is the quality of aliveness in the midst of the dark.

I am reminded of this poem by Rāmprasād Sen, from a collection called *Grace and Mercy in Her Wild Hair*. This is Kālī Mā, indeed. Even in the pleasure and ease of her grace, beauty, and mercy, there is this ongoing thread of wild fierceness.

Mother, incomparably arrayed
Hair flying, stripped down,
You battle-dance on Shiva's heart,
A garland of heads that bounce off
Your heavy hips, chopped-off hands
For a belt, the bodies of infants
For earrings, and the lips,
The teeth like jasmine, the face
A lotus blossomed, the laugh,
And the dark body boiling up and out
Like a storm cloud, and those feet
Whose beauty is only deepened by blood.

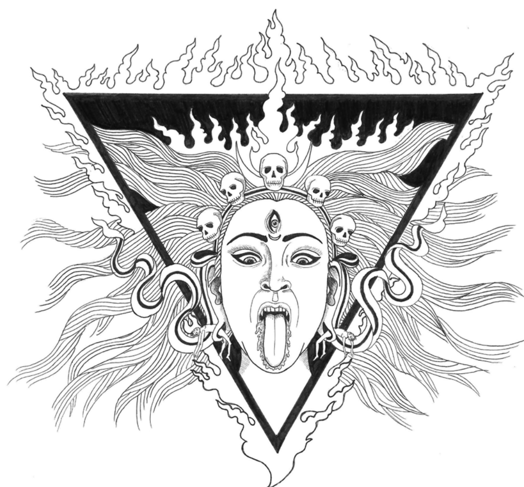
So Prasād cries: My mind is dancing!
Can I take much more? Can I bear
An impossible beauty?
(Nathan and Seely 1999:61)

What is this impossible beauty and the related fierceness that I keep referencing? One of the Sanskrit terms often translated as *fierce* is *ugrā*.* There are many other terms but this one is often especially used in relationship to the fierce deities, the ones who dance on the shadow side like our beautiful beloved Kālī.

Ugrā is variously translated as *powerful*, *mighty*, *strong*, *violent*, *terrible*, *fierce*, *cruel*, *ferocious*, *hot* and *sharp*. Can you feel the energy resonance underneath this collection of English words? They are trying to describe something that is felt—something that is often indescribable. What is this fierce energy for? Why do we need it?

To begin in our own bodies, know that *fierceness* is the energy of the fire of transformation. Most alchemical processes require heat. The cultivation of an open body, our surrender, and the undertaking of skillful practices can generate the kind of *heat* necessary to burn off what is unnecessary. We willfully go to the fire to be transformed.

On the Tantric path, practitioners cultivate and become comfortable with all the flavors of fierceness that are in themselves, in others, in the external world, and in the deities. Most Tantric practices have been designed to actually be somewhat *confrontational*, and thus require us to have the attitude of the heroine or hero, the warrioress or warrior. Tantric practices require us to come to terms with what is unhealed, and require us to be comfortable with the dark and scary aspects of ourselves and of the world. As you might intuit by now, this Tantric worldview includes everything on the path of awakening. We leave nothing behind. In some lineages, they separate out the



The face of transformation

challenges, perform austerities, abstain from meat, alcohol, and even from sexuality. In my lineage we might say that this form of awakening through austerities and *overcoming* is only a partial awakening because it is excluding so much.

On this Tantric path everything is included: even what I don't like, don't want, find distasteful, ugly, and painful. It is all welcome here in the lap of our Great Mother. Nothing and no one is left behind. This understanding can support us in dropping our ingrained notions of not being good enough or worthy. Our Mother Kālī not only welcomes everyone into her great lap with love, she also has the chops to eat and transform any and all of it with her great chops, her giant maw. That lolling tongue will drink it all.

Appreciating these qualities of Kālī Mā can encourage us to walk towards that which we find distasteful and painful (see the theme emerging again?). This path and our relationship with Kālī requires us at times to set down our preferences, our agendas (overt and subterranean), our boundaries, our habits, our normal ways of doing things, our controlling behaviors, our fears, and

not let them limit us, neither our thoughts nor actions. We move towards what we perceive as downright unnatural, scary, ridiculous, unwarranted, distasteful, unhelpful, dangerous, and even traumatic. We walk towards it bravely, into full presencing, asking: What needs to be healed here? How do I heal it? What needs to be addressed? How can I address it? What is available for transformation? Let me transform it with her support.

Since Kālī is also the goddess of both relative and absolute time, we also have the opportunity to develop the wisdom and discernment to know when to let things take their time. Sometimes turning towards the constriction with openness isn't enough though, and we also need to work on ourselves. We may need to bring a soft sense of spaciousness, thus allowing a constriction to unfold in its own time. We allow spacious time do the healing. We can't and shouldn't force things. As a result, we begin to develop the capacity to feel into intense situations and discover what is called for, where the healing potential is, and how to move towards it with love. This requires some of that dual awareness we discussed above, that sense of being *in* the room, having our own experience, and *watching* the room at the same time. Holding this allows us to move towards all of these situations with love, grace, mercy, and tenderness—all of these are necessary even as we find ourselves dancing wildly with matted hair.

I invite you to take a minute to feel into this energy. Can you sense why undertaking the Kālī practices might be understood as a challenging spiritual path, and yet also a quick one? Sometimes it's like trying to harness a benevolent volcano without getting third-degree burns. It's no wonder that the metaphor of fire is so prevalent in Tantric deity practice: we talk of "standing in the fire," "being cooked," "standing too close to the fire," "the inner fires," "being consumed," and even the "blazing" of the inner energies. None of this is metaphoric; this is all quite literal.

Sitting with this fierce and loving goddess Kālī, in all her names and qualities, in this fierce practice of the recitation of her hundred names over 108 nights helps us to cultivate the qualities necessary to authentically move towards the realities of all existence: it's a rough and tumble world and all that we love will be destroyed sooner if not later. It goes up in smoke and flames all the time! Take care, beloveds. We cannot stave off the happenings of the world and we cannot necessarily change much that is happening. We can change how we understand what is happening, however, and build our capacity to sit with what is actually happening without smokescreens, coddling, or clinging to partial truths.

To do this, we need these fierce qualities in ourselves. The fierce deities are committed to our awakening, and I know they have to sometimes be fierce to get my attention when I've wandered off. I respond more radiantly to the slicing swords than to the coddling. That's my personality type and why this path suits me. I suspect it is the same for many of you as well. We need a kind of fierce self-determination and conviction about our spiritual journeys and what we are undertaking no matter what the outside world would say about any of this. This fierceness and intention does not override our feminine qualities but instead holds them strongly so that they are useful and useable on the spiritual path. We drop rote identities that are associated with qualities we are attached to and sit with all the flavors of experience as they arise. Our fierceness allows our opening; it supports it fully. It is not surprising that the deities in this lineage are primarily fierce. This is about potentiating fierce bliss and awareness in the yoni.

Can you feel Kālī's nourishment in her fierce blackness? The qualities of *nourishing* and *fierce* are not separate. They are cultivated simultaneously and mixed together whenever possible. Along with the application of these fierce blessings

to the outer world, this cultivation process also requires us to apply them to our inner world. As Tantrikas, Kālī requires us to cultivate relentless unceasing self-love, lively nourishment, healing, surrender, a falling in love with her, a community of strong yoginīs and yogis to practice with, self-examination, and a willingness to go into uncharted territory, *mālā** and liturgy in hand.

In support of this, there are also a few qualities that we need to cultivate and utilize on the path as we begin to gather in our energies for undertaking this practice. We have to take agency and responsibility for our spiritual paths. Combined with a teacher and good companions, this will take us a long way. We have to do this work for ourselves; no one is going to do it for us. It requires fierce persistence, honesty, and capacity to keep going in the face of all we will endure on the path. We have to empower ourselves, as practitioners, with the resilience, perseverance, courage, and vitality necessary to walk this path over the long haul. And it is so worth it! The outer world will not necessarily condone us or support our spiritual practices; our fierceness and commitment to awakening in the body will take us through. This is one of the reasons why so many women who cultivate a lush interior spiritual practice do so without a lot of public notice, remaining as invisible as possible. The invisibility gives us space outside the gaze of others and allows us to follow the path as authentically as possible.